

All the Ways of Reading Literature: Preservice English Teachers' Perspectives on Disciplinary Literacy

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In recent years the field of literacy education and research has seen an increased attention to disciplinary literacy instruction—the teaching of discipline-specific and valued ways of reading, writing, knowing, and communicating knowledge. This article is about disciplinary literacy, specifically disciplinary reading as it is understood by preservice teachers of English language arts. Data were collected from two cohorts of preservice English teachers (2010–2011; 2011–2012). Qualitative content analysis of preservice teachers' writings and interview data suggests that “reading” in the discipline of English encompasses a range of approaches to texts. It can mean paying attention to the language and form of the text, or exploring the social and cultural worlds within the work. It can also mean applying different interpretive lenses, such as the lens of race, class, gender, or culture. Much of the data also contained preservice teachers' ideas for and concerns about teaching disciplinary literacy to adolescents. Insight into preservice teachers' perspectives on disciplinary literacy can support the work of teacher educators, student teaching supervisors, and mentor teachers.

Over the years, the field of literacy education and research has seen an increased attention to the teaching of disciplinary literacy—the teaching of discipline-specific and valued ways of reading, writing, knowing, and communicating knowledge. Disciplinary literacy instruction entails more than teaching reading strategies within a content area. Its aim, rather, is to teach students to not only understand and perform but also question the work of the discipline (Moje, 2008). According to the disciplinary literacy framework, each discipline has its own mode(s) of engaging with and interpreting texts as well as generating knowledge. Thus teachers cannot assume that students will be successful readers across subject matters as long as they have acquired a set of general and basic reading skills (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

The past 10 years have also seen the development and implementation of literacy curricula designed to “apprentice” students to disciplinary ways of reading. Schoenbach and colleagues’ reading apprenticeship framework (1999) is one such example. One component of the reading apprenticeship classroom is teacher modeling. Through modeling, teachers “read and think aloud,” making public the ways that they, as more expert members of a disciplinary community, make sense of terminology, choose among different reading comprehension strategies, and ask questions about the text. The teachers attempt to make visible the hidden or taken-for-granted rules of reading academic texts. Reading apprenticeship teachers “draw on their own experiences as readers in their disciplines, . . . making apparent both the challenges and the value of such reading” (Greenleaf, Brown, & Litman, 2004, p. 203). Echoing the comment by Greenleaf et al., Moje (2008) argued that in- and preservice teachers must first reflect on their understandings of the discipline (i.e., what is the work of the discipline; what does it mean to learn in the discipline) if they wish to teach disciplinary literacy to adolescents.

This article is about disciplinary literacy in English as it is understood by prospective middle school or high school English language arts teachers. Rather than examine their knowledge about disciplinary literacy in the broader sense (i.e., disciplinary literacy practices in different content areas, including but not limited to English), I confine my inquiry to exploring how preservice English teachers understand discipline-specific practices involving reading literature. In this article, I not only draw on existing scholarship on literacy in English literature and language arts (see Appleman, 2000; Blau, 2003; Langer, 1995; Lattimer, 2003; Lee, 1993; Petrosky, McConachie, & Mihalakis, 2010) but also work to extend the knowledge base by adding a less heard voice—the voices of preservice teachers. After conducting a meta-analysis of research on teachers’ attitudes toward disciplinary literacy, Hall (2005) concluded that more work has involved inservice than preservice teachers. However, insight into preservice teachers’ understandings of and questions about disciplinary literacy is crucial to the work of teacher educators, student teaching supervisors, and mentor teachers. Also, because preservice teachers occupy an interesting position—they are being socialized into the field of English education as well as the teaching profession more generally, and are being asked to imagine possibilities for their future practice—their perspectives warrant further inquiry. This means taking seriously what preservice teachers know and believe to be true about reading practices in secondary English classrooms.

In the pages that follow, I share what preservice ELA teachers identified as central reading practices of the discipline of English literature. I

also share what ideas and questions they had about teaching disciplinary literacy to adolescents. To do that, I drew on data from two cohorts of pre-service English teachers (2010–2011; 2011–2012), collected while teaching a course on adolescent literacy to a mixed-discipline group of preservice teachers (English, History, Mathematics, and Biology). I end the article by outlining several areas for future research and staking a claim about the value of disciplinary literacy, especially in *these times* when education, it is argued, should become more inter- and cross-disciplinary (Beers, 2007; Gardener, 2004).

Theoretical Frameworks

Central to this article is the framework of disciplinary literacy. However, I begin with a brief discussion of academic literacy (Lea & Street, 2006) because, though there are important distinctions between academic literacy and disciplinary literacy, there is overlap as well. For example, they both draw on New Literacy Studies and sociocultural perspectives of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984). Academic and disciplinary literacy also posit that learning, which is more than a simple acquisition of facts and skills, involves identity work in which learners see themselves as becoming participants in a field or community (Moje, 2008, 2011). Lastly, according to both theoretical frameworks, learning difficulties do not necessarily indicate a deficit or lack of intelligence on the part of the learner; rather, the difficulties are more likely a result of the learner encountering new and unfamiliar discourses.

Academic Literacies

The academic literacies model (Lea & Street, 2006) treats reading and literacy more generally as situated social practices that vary across cultures, contexts, and institutions. As a corrective to the autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1984), which sees reading as a free-floating, cognitive skill that is transferable across contexts and texts, the academic literacies model posits that students, depending on the academic department and institutional context, must navigate different, and often competing, conventions, expectations, and epistemologies when reading and producing texts. In other words, the model accounts for the contextual influence of academic reading and writing practices (Street, 2009).

Recently Schoenbach and Greenleaf (2010) introduced the concept of “engaged academic literacy” to describe a model of school-based literacy that is active, committed to fostering resilient learner identities, and tied to

conceptions of reading and writing as a sociocultural practice. The model acknowledges that reading is rarely done outside of a context and texts are not generic documents. Texts vary in genre, semiotic practices (e.g., use of signs and symbols), linguistic features, and organizational structures.

Disciplinary Literacy

Because a text, either implicitly or explicitly, draws on the discourses, concepts, and knowledge of the discipline, engaging with it is necessarily a disciplinary practice. Thus, I agree with Moje (2011) who suggests that disciplinary literacy is a more generative framework for exploring reading and learning in a disciplinary domain because it accounts for the role of specific practices, discourses, knowledge, and identities of the discipline.

Disciplinary literacy draws on the idea of discourse: “ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network” (Gee, 2001, p. 1). Given the concept of discourse, it makes sense that disciplines have discourses of their own. That is, disciplines have their own ways of knowing, using language, thinking, and even believing. For example, mathematicians read proofs to determine whether they are error-free. Historians, however, read a primary document to determine when and why it was produced, for whom it was written, and how it might relate to other documents (Stahl & Shanahan, 2004). Therefore, differences in disciplinary discourses reflect deeply rooted and taken-for-granted epistemological differences.

In addition to its epistemologies, the discipline demands that students take on particular identities (Moje, 2008). This means that students of English must not only recognize the nature of knowledge in their discipline but also come to see themselves as literary scholars-in-training. They must also learn to question the knowledge of the discipline. Therefore, ideally “knowledge, identities, and critical literacy skills develop iteratively” (Moje, 2008, p. 103). Moje reminds educators that *conceptual knowledge*, *learner identity*, and *critical literacy skills* are three essential, interdependent facets of disciplinary literacy. For instance, the development of critical literacy depends on having deep knowledge and seeing oneself as a member of a discipline, just as the development of a learner identity depends on having the knowledge and critical capacities needed to do the work of the discipline.

The argument that knowledge, critical literacy skills, and identities *develop* presumes that any disciplinary literacy practice, including reading, is a “separately learned, conventional activity” (Rabinowitz, 1998, p. 27). The conventions and beliefs surrounding the activity of reading literature

are varied, however. In fact, the discipline of English is made up of multiple discourse communities—New Historicism, formalism, feminism, and reader-response, to name a few—whose members understand “reading” differently (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009).

Of the communities that constitute English and literary studies, formalism (formerly New Criticism) and reader-response are two that have shaped middle school and high school English classes the most (Hynds & Appleman, 1997). The New Critics saw reading as performing a detailed analysis of the text. Authorial intention and readers’ affective responses were seen as distractions. Although New Critics are now considered a defunct group within the discipline, formalists share similarities with the New Critics in their use of close reading practices, belief in textual autonomy, and “objective” approach to literary analysis (Selden, 1989). Unlike formalists, reader-response theorists (Fish, 1998; Rosenblatt, 1964, 1968) argued that readers’ identities and prior knowledge necessarily shape the way they experience the text. According to Fish (1998), readers’ activities are regarded “not as leading to meaning, but as having meaning” (p. 982). Reader-response theorized the reader as active, bringing to the text a wealth of experiences, knowledge, and beliefs. It also challenged the notion of a text as a tightly sealed container that holds one true meaning, thereby acknowledging the validity of multiple interpretations to a single text. Yet reader-response theorists also stressed that they do not endorse an “anything goes” approach to reading. Rosenblatt (1964) wrote, “Assessment of the relative validity of different individual interpretations is possible . . . in terms of their greater or lesser relevance to the text” (p. 126).

Given the different discourse communities that make up the discipline of English, I wondered where and how preservice ELA teachers were situated within this vast and complex terrain. More specifically, I wondered what reading practices they identified as central to the discipline. In the next section, I describe what data sources, as well as where, from whom, and how I collected the data for this inquiry.

Methods

Course

My 10-week course on adolescent literacy is offered within a Master of Arts in Teaching Program at a small, private Northeastern school. The program values cultivating disciplinary ways of knowing and thinking. To that end, preservice teachers take four graduate-level courses in the discipline (e.g., English, history, mathematics, or biology) and four education courses. They

also take two methods courses, which are co-taught by an education faculty member and a faculty member from the discipline. Preservice teachers also complete student-teaching requirements as mandated by the state. Upon completing the program, they receive a master's degree and state certification to teach.

In my adolescent literacy course, preservice teachers encounter a range of literacy frameworks, such as literacy as sociocultural practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000); as mastery of secondary discourses (Gee, 2001); and as the capacity to read the word and world (Freire, 1987). We begin with the assumption that adolescents, even those struggling to engage with academic and school-based texts, read and make sense of their worlds with sophistication and thoughtfulness (Luke & Elkins, 2000).

During class six, we focus specifically on disciplinary literacy. Across the four disciplines (English, biology, mathematics, and history), all preservice teachers reread "What Is Literacy?" (Gee, 1991). They also read two articles on disciplinary literacy—one by Elizabeth Moje (2008) and the other by Timothy and Cynthia Shanahan (2008). Lastly, they receive an additional reading that is specific to the disciplinary domain they are studying. English preservice teachers are assigned a book chapter, "Disciplinary Literacy in the English Language Arts Classroom" (Petrosky et al., 2010).

As part of class six, I ask preservice teachers to complete a project in which they reflect on what they see as the work of their discipline, how they approach discipline-specific texts (e.g., peer-reviewed science journals, literary criticism, proofs, primary documents), and what reading practices are demanded by the discipline. Below is a description of the project:

In this assignment you will be engaging in the act of "translation." Your job is to translate your understanding of disciplinary literacy into another genre or medium—a poem, video, essay, painting, dance, etc. Of course, before you begin the work of translation, you must first grapple with how you understand and what you think about disciplinary literacy—the ways of reading, engaging texts, and communicating knowledge that are valued by your discipline. For example, think about how historians read a primary source document. What are some of the questions you ask yourself as a reader of a primary document? What does it mean to read like a historian?

After you have finished creating your "text," write a convincing, 2–3 page essay that describes why you chose this particular genre, how you have demonstrated the literacy of your discipline, and your comments about the task.

I encourage you to explore a genre that is unfamiliar for you. Have fun. Take a risk. Working in a new genre/medium forces you to reconstruct what you think you know about disciplinary literacy.

An underlying premise of the assignment is that teachers cannot effectively support adolescent learners unless they reflect on the discourses of *their* discipline. Also, asking preservice teachers to translate their understanding of disciplinary literacy into a different genre stems from the belief that a “person who has learned deeply . . . can use a variety of representational forms—most notably reading and writing of written texts, but also oral language, visual images, music or artistic representations—to communicate their learning” (Moje, 2008, p. 99).

Participants

This article is based on data collected from two cohorts of preservice English teachers. In 2010, I taught 11 preservice English teachers. All 11 were white: 2 were men, and 9 were women. In 2011, I taught 10 preservice English teachers: Three were men (2 white, 1 Latino), and 7 were women (6 white and 1 Caribbean American). The preservice teachers brought a range of professional experiences, such as working at Planned Parenthood or Harlem Children’s Zone. Although the majority of the 21 preservice teachers had been English majors, there were also drama, American studies, art history, and educational studies majors.

Data Collection

Because I am a teacher educator studying my students’ learning, I drew on practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and case study (Stake, 1995) data collection methods. For two years I kept a teaching journal in which I recorded what happened in class, focusing on comments and questions raised by preservice teachers. I recorded the interaction patterns and participation structures as well, attending not only to what was said but also who spoke when, to whom, and how often. In the teaching journal, I also reflected, after class, on what had occurred. Throughout the 10-week academic quarter, I collected the preservice teachers’ writings (e.g., assignments and projects, weekly responses to course readings, email communication). I also had access to teachers’ in-class work, including focused freewrites, exit slips, and charts and posters made by groups.

After the course, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a smaller subset of preservice English teachers. I employed a purposeful sampling strategy, selecting 6 preservice teachers who were diverse in terms of age, gender, and training in English literature. I interviewed 3 preservice teachers from the first cohort in February 2011, and 3 preservice teachers from

the second cohort in February 2012. I chose the month of February because it was after I submitted course grades, but before the preservice teachers graduated from the teacher education program.

Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed in their entirety. In transcribing, I captured all the words, vocalized sounds (e.g., *uh huh, um, uh*), restarts, and self-corrections. I treated the interviews as an opportunity to not only deepen and complicate what I learned from the qualitative content analysis but also achieve methodological triangulation (Stake, 1995).

Approach to Data Analysis

I directed my efforts at analyzing the English teachers' projects and essays on disciplinary literacy. For the project, members of both cohorts created a range of artifacts. From the first cohort, Karen created a PowerPoint presentation as a way to show her reading process of "One Art," an Elizabeth Bishop poem. Each slide depicted the moves she made as a reader (e.g., reading the poem several times, focusing on interesting or puzzling stanzas, rereading a stanza with a particular question in mind, annotating, investigating references made in the poem). Michael wrote a short story titled "King Lear Walks into a Bar." Describing the piece, Michael wrote, "I sent my Lear to a bar, in which he tells the story of *King Lear* to a willing bartender. The man, named Duff, learns from Lear's story and is profoundly moved by it."

From the second cohort, Sally created a pamphlet that contained four different analyses of one short story. Bob wrote a short poem that invited readers to look at a word—in this case the word *star*—and ask themselves what it could mean. He offered two possible meanings of the word ("Isn't it someone whose picture is taken for money/Or is it a great cosmic light?") and interrogated both meanings.

Considering that my primary data source were teacher writings, I employed conventional content analysis methods (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000). First, I read all 21 projects and accompanying essays to obtain a sense of the whole, jotting any initial noticings, ideas, and questions. One initial noticing was that although much of the data mentioned "interpretation" as the work of the discipline, preservice teachers' understandings of and approaches to interpretation varied.

Rather than read the writings to evaluate the preservice teachers' knowledge of disciplinary literacy, I took an ethnographic perspective in my analysis. I attempted to understand the meanings that participants made in the context of their writing by inquiring into the ideas, questions, and issues

presented in them. I highlighted reoccurring words and phrases, such as *character analysis*; *multiple interpretations*; *subjective*; *multiple lenses*; *close reading*; *rereading*; *authorial intention*; *identifying themes*; *literary elements*; *symbols*; *metaphors*; *reader response*; *no “right” answer*; *identity*; *determining relevance*; *literary theory*. From the list of words and phrases, I developed an initial set of codes. The codes were inductive and descriptive in the sense that many of them came directly from the data and described the content in the teachers’ writings. If there were multiple words or phrases that referred to the same idea, such as the idea of “multiple interpretations,” a single code was applied to them.

With my coding scheme, I reread all 21 projects and essays. In this round of analysis, I focused on refining my coding scheme and forming categories by grouping related codes. For example, I grouped the codes of “text-to-self connections,” “text-to-world connections,” “social issues,” “universal themes,” and “life lessons” into the category of *exploring the self and world*. I also grouped the codes of “literary elements,” “attention to language,” “analysis of craft,” and “text features” into the category of *close reading*. Both categories speak to the larger theme around ways of reading literature.

After grouping the rest of the categories, I identified three themes: (1) ways of reading literature; (2) ideas for future practice; and (3) questions around teaching disciplinary reading. These themes reflect not only how preservice teachers understood disciplinary reading but also whether and how they would implement it in their classrooms. Two out of the three themes emerging from data analysis had to do with questions about and ideas for the actual teaching of disciplinary reading practices.

After generating the themes, I did a third reading of the 21 projects and essays and 6 interview transcripts for the purposes of identifying and extracting content that was relevant to each theme. On a separate document, I listed the three themes; and for each theme, I copied and pasted all of the relevant content from the data sources. This helped me to work toward building claims and assertions about each theme. For example, much of the content for the first theme—ways of reading literature—revealed that practices (i.e., what preservice teachers do with texts) are informed by teachers’ beliefs about purposes for reading. Also revealed were the different views on “close reading” as a disciplinary practice.

Because I analyzed data from two cohorts, I also noted whether and what commonalities existed across the preservice teachers from different years and cohorts, and if my findings resonated across different groups of participants. As such, it was an effort at achieving not only data source triangulation but also theoretical generalizability (Fine, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

Ways of Reading Literature

According to preservice teachers' projects and essays, disciplinary reading encompasses several different approaches and tasks. Reading can mean paying attention to the language and form of the text. It can refer to explor-

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ing the social and cultural worlds within the text, and using the text to better understand oneself and/or the human condition. It can also include engaging and debating literary criticism, knowing the discourse of literary theory, or applying an interpretive lens to texts. Some of the

projects—even the ones that took up and focused on a single approach to reading—acknowledged that the ways of reading are not mutually exclusive. According to several teachers, the first step to close reading is experiencing the text and responding personally, an idea that I discuss in the next section.

Close Reading

In more than half of the 21 teachers' writings, "close reading"—an approach that calls for close and careful attention to the form and language of the text (Gallop, 2007)—was named as a salient reading practice. According to Francine Prose (2006), individuals who practice this way of reading are "conscious of style, of diction, of how sentences [are] formed and information [is] being conveyed, how the writer [is] structuring plot, creating characters, employing detail and dialogue" (p. 3). Many of the preservice teachers agreed that "close reading" involves analyzing structure, language, and literary devices (e.g., symbolism, imagery, irony). Yet they held different views on the purpose of close reading. For example, Bob and Eleanor (Year 2) both created projects around close reading as a practice demanded and valued by the discipline. Bob and Eleanor had studied English as undergraduates. In an interview, I asked them to define close reading.

Bob (Year 2, Interview): Close reading, I would say, there's looking at the story itself, but also looking at the writing and how it's crafted. And that can be all sorts of things. That can be punctuation. That can be the narrative voice. Down to the length and the brevity of the story. Vocabulary, what words the author uses, you know, diction. Looking for symbols and literary devices, and how that relates to the story as a whole.

Eleanor (Year 2, Interview): I think, first of all it has to do with close reading . . . kind of taking a paragraph and looking at it over and over again . . . I think it's probably one of the most effective ways to find textual evidence

of the author's intent, or evidence of what your reaction to it was. You know, why did I think this? Why did I think this character was particularly formidable, or intriguing or kind of scary? Well maybe it's because a lot of the words that the character used, the sounds were really dissonant. There were a lot of s's or t's. Close reading can you give insight into your initial ideas about the texts and what your initial take-away thoughts were, and it can also give you new insights in terms of, "Wow I didn't even look at how the paragraphs were organized or the ways in which, reading a dialogue, you really don't know who is talking."

Bob saw close reading as paying attention to the parts (e.g., narrative voice, length of the piece, diction) to understand the whole. Although it is important for students to know what the story is about, Bob suggested that it might be equally, if not more, important for students to know how and why the story works. He assumed that people become better writers by taking seriously and analyzing authorial decisions, and believed that the purpose of close reading is learning the craft of a writer.

Eleanor had a slightly different take on the purpose of close reading. She believed that attention to language and literary elements can help readers understand the way they are personally experiencing or responding to the text (e.g., "Why did I think this character was particularly formidable or intriguing?"). Close reading allows readers to have a response that is both authentic to the reader *and* responsible to the text. Although Eleanor and Bob agreed on the centrality of close reading as a disciplinary practice, they articulated different purposes for close reading. Bob posited that close reading supports readers to see the craft of the writer and workings of the narrative, whereas Eleanor suggested that close reading allows readers to understand their own reader responses.

For Karen (Year 1), close reading helps the reader to make sense of authorial choices and look self-consciously at the way she experiences a text. Karen, a dual art history and English major, created a PowerPoint to illustrate the way she read the poem "One Art." Like Bob, she recognized that an underlying premise of close reading is the acceptance of texts as constructions—constructed by writers making decisions and working within and/or against literary traditions. As part of the essay, she wrote, "Readers who are able to participate fully in the literature discipline understand that writers make choices. And as readers we must search for meaning in all of these choices and not take any of them for granted."

Yet like Eleanor, she believed that close reading allows a reader to understand and build on personal responses to a text.

Karen (writing): The margins were full of questions and disconnected thoughts. It was a place where I could express, simply, “I like the sound of this line” or “this message speaks to me.” I did not need to come to any conclusions, but writing through my questions was a way to take what I did not know and turn it into rich material to explore.

Hynds and Appleman (1997) warn English educators that “An unreflective mixing of both text- and reader-centered strategies may result in a hodge-podge of teaching strategies, based on mutually incompatible goals” (p. 276). Eleanor (Year 2) and Karen (Year 1) saw text and reader-centered approaches as intertwined and mutually supportive. Readers’ responses (e.g., “I like the sound of this line” or “This character was scary”) are often the starting point for a more targeted inquiry into the language of the text. Conversely, a more targeted inquiry into the language of the text can deepen, expand, and enrich the readers’ responses or reactions. As evidenced by the projects they created, all 21 preservice teachers believed that disciplinary reading entailed moving *beyond* personal responses and connections by drawing on the actual text.

Exploring the Self and World

After close reading, the second most commonly cited approach to reading was exploring the self and world. Michael (Year 1) and 5 teachers suggested that perhaps the most valuable reading practice is to explore the cultural and social worlds of the text, including the human characters that inhabit these worlds. Such reading is done for the purposes of understanding the self and other people.

An interesting finding is that 4 of these 6 teachers resisted close reading for leading to a myopic approach, an overemphasis on the written word at the expense of understanding the story world and the self within the story. They believed that the *primary* responsibility of English educators is to foster more empathetic and compassionate human beings, and that “dissecting” (Michael, Year 1) a single word or phrase could obscure the larger world and human conditions contained within the literary text. For his assignment, Michael (Year 1), an English major, wrote a modern-day *King Lear*. In this essay, he wrote,

Michael (writing): I thought about the purpose of the word itself when used for artistic and/or literary reasons. Simply put, I got to thinking about what the function of telling and hearing stories is. My conclusion . . . was that stories should serve the function of teaching people about the world. Words should be true to the world, and stories should tell us things about ourselves and others.

Describing his decision to rewrite *King Lear*, he said in an interview, “I think this with a lot of Shakespeare stories. There is the big picture, and there is something personal within that that you can relate to. There’s always some kind of intimate human story.” Michael wanted adolescents to make text-to-self connections and wonder what *King Lear* might have to say about their world. After taking the course, Michael went on to student-teach sophomores at an urban high school. Alongside the primary text, *Julius Caesar*, Michael asked students to read articles on the political revolution of Egypt and discuss the causes and effects of revolutions. Rather than the language, he focused mostly on the “big picture” story. For Michael, reading involves finding a relationship between the text and the contemporary world, no matter how seemingly far removed the text appears from the readers’ realities.

Like Michael, Marty (Year 2) found reading primarily for language and structure limiting. She focused on one aspect of the story world: the human characters. For the assignment, she wrote,

Marty (writing): Literary reading provides individuals the opportunity to try on and “test drive” new roles. Through this practice, one can relive significant life experiences, recover buried desires or feelings, explore new resolutions to old or persistent or future conflicts, and engage in unfamiliar behaviors and interactions with oneself and others—living, imaginary, supernatural, or dead.

Unlike reading historical documents or science journals, Marty argued that literary reading is ethical and imaginative—it involves immersing oneself in the story world and imagining what it must be like to exist in that world. Through such imaginative engagement, readers can try on new roles and identities, even identities that are feared. An assumption underlying the perspectives put forth by Marty and Michael is that literature has meaning and significance beyond its particular references to a specific time and place, and particular literary characters.

What about Theory?

Only two preservice teachers addressed literary theory. Although data are limited—only two projects across both cohorts referred to literary theory—its very absence suggests that “theory” might not occupy a prominent space within preservice teachers’ understanding of disciplinary reading practices.

For the project on disciplinary literacy, Katherine (Year 1) composed a response to the essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988), and to postcolonial literary theory more broadly. According to Katherine, highly valued by the discipline is the capacity to engage and interrogate an essay

like “Can the Subaltern Speak?” That capacity is also the criteria used to differentiate pleasure readers and literature scholars. Although recognizing it as an essential part of scholarship, Katherine, recalling the frustration she had felt as she read Gayatri Spivak for a graduate-level literature course, characterized theory as inaccessible and elitist.

Sally (Year 2) understood “theory” as an interpretive lens. For the project, she analyzed a character out of “Po ‘Sandy,” a short story written by Charles Chesnutt. The project illustrated the ways that a reader can read the same text through different perspectives—the perspectives of culture, race, class, and gender. She wrote, “To take part within the literary community, a person needs to understand how texts are critically analyzed and interpreted.”

Sally made two important points. First, readings are never neutral—they are always shaped by commitments, values, and interests that a reader brings to the text. Second, high school teachers should ask students to pay attention to the gender, class, and racial identities of literary characters. However, she also understood “theory” in ways that are not reflective of the current state of the discipline. She conceptualized theory as a pair of lenses that readers can put on and take off at will, rather than a “systematic reflection on [readers’] guiding assumptions” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 20). Depending on the lens, certain aspects of the text are either foregrounded or obscured. Furthermore, she did not interrogate the assumptions behind each lens. For example, the gender lens, as it was used by Sally, assumed that women are always powerless.

Although they are not full-fledged practicing members of English studies—the same way that a literature professor or even a doctoral student might be—most preservice teachers thoughtfully articulated how and why they read literature. They also addressed what disciplinary reading might look like in their future practice.

Ideas for Practice

Though the assignment did not ask preservice teachers to make explicit connections to practice, they named different ideas they had for teaching young people. The most often named idea for practice was using a range of texts, including popular culture texts. Katherine (Year 1) believed that students should read and write texts of different genres and modes. In her disciplinary literacy project, she wrote, “I imagine students in my classroom responding to not only books, but video games, movies, music, art. Writing back takes the form of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, photos, webpages, podcasts, orations,

collages.” English teachers can leverage the new media and texts that are already part of youth culture, such as hip-hop lyrics (Alim, 2007); television programs (Trainor, 2004); religious or cultural icons (Cowan, 2004); and websites (Vasudevan, 2007). These texts can be used *alongside* canonical texts (for an example, see Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, for a description of pairing hip-hop lyrics and poetry). Samuel (Year 2) wrote, “When a student brings in a new media text that’s meaningful to them, a teacher could work with the student to expose and expand upon its importance and relevance to the discipline.” Samuel suggested asking students to present a case for studying a popular culture text as part of the English curriculum, thereby working to build reciprocity between out-of-school and in-school texts. Karen (Year 1) similarly proposed getting students to wonder what kinds of texts literary scholars usually study, and why they might study poems and novels but not hip-hop lyrics. By exploring these questions, adolescents can begin to see what is included and excluded from the discipline, and ask how a text becomes canonical.

Several preservice teachers worried that such broadening of texts might detract from the discipline’s focus on literature. However, English departments these days are as likely to analyze online fan fiction as much as canonical texts (Moje, 2008). The discipline of literature continues to redraw its boundaries so that the past two decades have seen literary studies transform into cultural studies (Easthope, 1991; Greenblatt & Giles, 1992).

The second idea for pedagogy involved teaching *critical* disciplinary literacy. Michael (Year 1) suggested getting students to tackle fundamental questions concerning the values of the discipline—that is, getting students to ask why English is important, and why it is important to them personally. Claire (Year 2) created a collage that showed a web of texts (newspaper articles, advertisements, and books), a mirror that reflected the “self,” and pictures of other people. To the side, she pasted a magazine picture of a teenager holding a magnifying glass. The teenager is examining the web and asking, “Why do I have to take English?”

A central element of critical pedagogy is dialogue. In their essays, Michael and Karen (Year 1) as well as Peter and Betsy (Year 2) wrote that they planned to create more dialog-rich classrooms. Peter (Year 2) composed a poem that juxtaposes the thoughts of a student with those of an English teacher. In other words, he represented how a student might understand and experience the disciplinary domain of English versus how a teacher might see it. In his assignment, he wrote, “Rarely do we have the privilege of hearing a cross dialogue between the two, where both students and teachers

share with each other their expectations, fears, needs, anxieties, hopes and aspirations in literature and in a literature classroom context.”

The last idea for teaching disciplinary literacy, which emerged from the interview data, is to adopt a practice-oriented approach. According to Beach and Myers (2001), adolescents can acquire skills, knowledge, and practices of the discipline through prolonged participation. During her interview, Sally (Year 2) provided a helpful example of learning close reading through practice, specifically the practice of drama:

Sally (interview): I think I didn’t really start close reading . . . until I started acting. Especially Shakespeare because you have to know really well what’s going on, what words are being used, why, what are they being informed, what does all of it mean. So that came naturally because then I had to perform it so I had to know really well what I was doing, and thinking, and saying in order to be able to communicate it so that people could understand what was going on in the text.

Sally learned to close read through performing Shakespeare. There was a real audience for the work, as well as a purpose for close reading. She came to self-identify as an actor as a result of being part of a troupe, a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As Lave and Wenger note, “Developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgeably skillful are part of the same process” (p. 65). Through performance, students can experience ways of knowing a text. They have to embody the language, become the character, and live the work. Rather than dissect the language or hunt for literary devices for the sake of writing a paper, students, through drama, are “doing” the work of the discipline (e.g., interpreting, [re]writing, imagining, communicating), and they are doing it as part of a group of fellow performers.

Questions about Teaching Disciplinary Reading Practices

I acknowledge the possible limitations of my study—namely, because I assigned readings that present a particular view of disciplinary literacy, the projects could have conformed to the ideas and frameworks of the course. I also realize that given the stance of the larger teacher education program, the preservice teachers might have been predisposed to disciplinary literacy frameworks. It is also possible that preservice teachers, in their writing and interviews, offered responses they believed I wanted to hear.

However, not all preservice teachers embraced the idea of teaching disciplinary-specific reading practices. In fact, analysis of projects and interview transcripts revealed that teachers raised questions and concerns

that were not mentioned in the course readings. About two-thirds of the preservice English teachers struggled with the boundaries of interpretation. Although they acknowledged that there is more than one correct interpretation of a literary text—texts have layers of meaning, and interpretations are subjective—they wondered what the discipline sees as a misreading, and who or what decides whether a response is valid. For the project, Ellen (Year 2) created an intricately woven placemat to represent disciplinary reading as the weaving together of text and reader—half of the strips of the placemat showed the life and interests of the reader; the other half were parts of the actual text. In the essay she reflected on the tension between valuing *all* interpretations, even the idiosyncratic ones, and valuing interpretations backed by textual support. She posed the question, “I wonder how to help students feel like their opinions and interpretations really matter when sometimes the discipline says they don’t.”

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Katherine (Year 1) questioned the accessibility of the discipline and acknowledged the possibility that adolescents and even adults might be denied access into certain conversations of the disciplinary community. Responding to the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988), she challenged the ways that literacy scholars use language, albeit unintentionally, to alienate the very people for whom they are writing:

Katherine (writing): I felt infuriated by the use of highly intellectual language in the text. Who was she writing this essay for? She claims in her essay that the subaltern cannot speak. It seems to me that she uses language to keep non-intellectual from wielding powerful ideas.

The ability to interrogate “Can the Subaltern Speak?” assumes a certain level of knowledge. Although Katherine had enough knowledge to access the essay and understand its arguments, she worried that most high school students lack the background knowledge or command of the discourse of postcolonialism.

Preservice teachers also expressed questions about whether and how disciplinary literacy aligns with other ways of teaching, such as inquiry-based or interdisciplinary instruction. Although inquiry pedagogy and disciplinary literacy instruction need not be mutually exclusive, Kimberly (Year 1) voiced the following concern:

Kimberly (writing): Learning is personal. So you cannot personally trod in the beaten path of someone else if you really want to learn. I also think a necessary sense of wonder is lost when you simply accept the tenets of a discipline.

Kimberly resisted the idea of teachers, as the more knowledgeable expert, imparting the “tenets of the discipline” to students. Instead, she believed that teachers should create opportunities for each student to explore, get lost, and construct knowledge. Others were drawn to the idea of interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Dan (Year 2) wondered whether disciplinary literacy was reinforcing “artificial boundaries” separating the content areas. In his project, he wrote, “I have lingering questions about how interdisciplinary teaching can still fit in with disciplinary specific ways of thinking.” Preservice teachers are figuring out their professional identities and trying on pedagogical frameworks. It makes sense that they are grappling with whether and how disciplinary literacy instruction fits with their visions of teaching.

The interview data surfaced questions of a different nature. All 6 teachers wondered if they had enough experience to be able to teach disciplinary literacy. Jim (Year 1) said, “This idea, the kind of reading, I was never taught how to do. It wasn’t demanded of me until college. In high school, it’s all very like, very superficial reading. And very superficial examination of characters. And I went to a good high school.” Of high school English, Sally (Year 2, interview) remembered the “worksheets—what happened, why did this character do this and why did that character do that, and what was the theme. It was all very rote.” Karen (Year 1, interview) similarly described high school English instruction as leading to a “worshipful approach” to texts that required students to underline, copy relevant quotes, and memorize the interpretation of others, usually that of the teacher.

In addition to expressing concerns about the limitations of their own educational autobiographies, preservice teachers wondered if teaching disciplinary literacy would be possible given the conditions of real middle schools and high schools and learners of diverse interests, skills, and background knowledge. Jim (interview) said, “It’s not going to happen in just one class. It’s going to be over time. And I would like to do it year in and year out.” Time was not the only constraint, however. Jim also argued that “school English”—English instruction he had experienced as an adolescent and was witnessing as a student teacher—was nothing like the discipline of English he experienced at the undergraduate level. Thus, disciplinary literacy instruction would involve changing the ways that teachers, students, administrators, and even policymakers conceptualize “school English.”

Teaching students to become junior members of a disciplinary community was appealing, yet not very practical, according to Jim.

Closing Thoughts

Directions for Research

In this article, I shared what preservice English teachers understood as disciplinary reading, and their ideas and questions about teaching disciplinary reading to adolescents. I want to conclude by articulating some areas for further research and by proposing what teachers can learn from disciplinary literacy.

Because my research focused on reading practices, it raises questions regarding disciplinary writing. The majority of teacher candidates self-identified as readers, and most recalled memories of literacy events that involved reading. In an interview, Sally (Year 2) shared, “I love reading so much more than I enjoy writing. I need to be really aware of that when I am a teacher.” Research on English teachers’ views on and ideas for teaching discipline-based writing can support prospective teachers like Sally as they figure out what, how, and for what purposes their students will write.

In addition to supporting adolescents in meeting the writing demands, English teachers are being called upon to integrate and teach nonfiction and informational texts. Considering that the Common Core State Standards Initiative for English Language Arts requires the integration of informational texts traditionally taught as part of the history curriculum (e.g., for grades 9–10, Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” George Washington’s “Farewell Address,” and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech), what English teachers think about teaching informational texts is another area ripe for further inquiry.

Every year in my course, preservice teachers desire more real-life, on-the-ground examples of promising classroom practices for teaching disciplinary literacy. They often refer to the “theory and practice” divide (i.e., schools of education teach theories that are difficult to translate into practice). Therefore, all teachers can benefit by seeing rich images of disciplinary literacy instruction *in action*. Such research would necessarily include not only the pedagogical moves made by the classroom teacher but also the ways that adolescents respond to disciplinary literacy instruction. That is, it would showcase the adolescent learners as they encounter and try on disciplinary-specific ways of reading, writing, and thinking. It would also show whether and how adolescents develop identities as members of a disciplinary community. Through examples of deep engagement and powerful

learning, preservice teachers can imagine what *could* be in their own classrooms. The examples can also prompt inservice teachers to look critically and self-consciously at their classrooms, noticing whether and what kind of opportunities exist for students to experience deep and powerful learning.

The field of English education can also benefit from continued research on how students' cultural and linguistic resources can be leveraged

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to support disciplinary learning. There are few examples such as Carol Lee's cultural modeling (1993, 2003), which aligns the everyday knowledge and discourses of African American students with disciplinary practices and knowledge (for other examples see Fecho, 2004). Now more than ever,

English educators are teaching an increasingly diverse student population. Thus, classroom-based studies of disciplinary literacy instruction that show teachers drawing on students' primary discourses and cultural knowledge must remain central to the research agenda (Moje, 2002; Moje et al., 2004). Teachers and researchers must study not only what students take away from disciplinary learning communities but also what they bring into them.

Lastly, there needs to be more research on how preservice teachers' knowledge of and attitudes toward disciplinary literacy impact student learning. Very little research on preservice teachers extends over time and into their classroom practice (Cochran-Smith, 2005). In other words, teacher educators and researchers can study how preservice teachers' knowledge and beliefs play out in the classroom, and how it affects student learning.

Why Disciplinary Literacy in *These Times*?

Because there are compelling arguments that education should become more inter- and cross-disciplinary (see Beers, 2007; Gardener, 2004), and because English education is as an "*interdisciplinary* [emphasis added] field of academic inquiry" (Alsup et al., 2006, p. 279), I want to conclude by sharing what preservice ELA teachers can gain from grappling with disciplinary literacy.

Louise (Year 2, writing): I had always associated my lack of achievement in science as a reflection of my abilities even though I was a stellar History and English student. Previously, I had chalked this dearth of competence to a variety of reasons—being more story based rather than reason based or perhaps it was the fulfillment of the gender perception about math and science being more of a male area of interest and success. The idea of disciplinary literacy provided me with a deeper understanding of how learning happens in context.

Jack (Year 2, writing): I will resist the temptation to tell my students that a new subject is hard (as I was told when learning to read); instead, I would have them see what they are learning as *new*, and to acknowledge that difference and what it means for their learning. Something new is much better than something hard.

As Louise and Jack suggest, the framework of disciplinary literacy helped preservice ELA teachers see learning and reading as situated within a context that has its own discourse(s). That realization is important for ELA teachers, for they are often called upon to remedy most, if not all, reading and writing “problems,” regardless of the content area. Preservice teachers realized—many for the first time—that reading a poem and making sense of a historical document require different knowledge and interpretive approaches, and therefore might pose different challenges for students. Louise recognized that the struggle might not be a reflection of the students’ abilities or lack thereof; Jack thought of emphasizing the newness of an idea or skill. Through reflecting on the reading practices that are specific to the discipline of English, most preservice ELA teachers voiced a stronger commitment to making the discipline—its knowledge, practices, and discourses—more transparent, accessible, and relevant to the students through teacher-modeling, discussions, and inquiry-based pedagogies (e.g., integrating multiple genres and modes of texts; getting students to generate questions regarding the discipline). And even if the preservice teachers resisted the idea of teaching disciplinary literacy, they accepted that adolescents, on any given day, are being asked to navigate a range of disciplinary discourses, knowledge, and even identities. More importantly, they began to cultivate a stance toward disciplinary reading, considering the different approaches to and purposes for reading literature, and gaining awareness of the particular practices, knowledge, and identities that they value and hope to teach as future English language arts educators.

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